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## **U.S. Pushes for Increased Transparency in the WTO**

The United States today presented proposals in Geneva to improve the World Trade Organization's public outreach efforts. The proposals, which seek to provide better and more timely public access to information about the WTO and its operations, build upon previous U.S. efforts to enhance transparency at the WTO.

United States Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky applauded the work of WTO Director General Mike Moore and the WTO General Council under the leadership of Chairman Kare Bryne of Norway for continued efforts at making the WTO more transparent, but cautioned that more work remains.

"Mike Moore and the WTO staff have taken valuable steps to enhance communications among WTO Members and to improve public understanding of the WTO, but now is the time for WTO Members themselves to step up to the challenge of making the WTO more accessible and responsive to continuing public concerns," said Ambassador Barshefsky. "Given the increasing prominence that trade and trade agreements play in the global economy, it is critical that WTO Members immediately improve their communications with the public.

"To ensure that they do, we will continue to push for the early release of documents and decisions, which are essential to improving public understanding and support of the WTO's work. Greater openness is not only fundamental to ensuring the credibility of the dispute settlement system, but will also help developing countries who are not parties to the dispute gain practical knowledge by observing the proceedings."

The United States has led efforts among WTO Members to make the institution more open and accountable in its day-to-day operations, including through new procedures in 1996 on the release of

WTO documents to the public. Together with Canada, the U.S. has proposed that the WTO further improve its policies on the "derestriction" of documents, including through the more timely release of dispute panel reports. Today's proposals provided another opportunity for the U.S. to reiterate its position that the WTO dispute settlement process should provide the opportunity for parties to observe official proceedings, that all dispute settlement documents should be made publicly available, and that procedures should allow for private parties to submit "friends of the court" briefs in dispute settlement cases.

Other elements of the U.S. proposal include:

- Regularizing WTO outreach programs (such as the WTO High-Level Symposium on Trade and the Environment);
- Opening certain WTO meetings to observers on an experimental basis, in particular the biennial or quadrennial reviews conducted by the Members on individual countries' trade regimes; and
- Continued improvements to the WTO Web site to provide more country-specific information to help small and medium-sized businesses around the world.

In addition, the U.S. proposed that WTO Members study the outreach practices of other international organizations for guidance on how to improve the WTO's communications with the public.

Recognizing that individual governments bear the primary responsibility for consulting with their own constituents when they formulate trade policy, the U.S. also proposed that WTO Members discuss their respective consultation processes in Geneva to learn from each other how to ensure that the views of interested members of the public are taken into account.